

Patricia Stich Summers

We are gathered this afternoon to bear witness to our faith in the resurrection, the resurrection of all who are baptized and buried in Jesus Christ our Lord and the resurrection of Patricia Stich Summers. Patricia died on Monday, losing her battle with cancer. She was 50.

Patricia Stich was born in 1950 in Albuquerque, New Mexico, the fourth of eight children and the second of three girls born to Lawrence and Patricia Stich. Patricia grew up in McLean, Virginia, graduating from Langley High School in 1977. She continued her studies at Mary Washington College, where she excelled in foreign languages. She studied abroad one year in Austria, before taking her BA degree in 1981.

In 1987 Patricia and William Summers married. Over the next few years Patricia moved around the country with her US Army officer husband, and had two children, Lauren and William.

Patricia was a multi-talented person. She could easily memorize long poems and lines of poetry. She loved rock music and knew many songs by heart as well. When singing, she had the knack of closely imitating the sound and texture of the original artist. She was an ardent PC gaming enthusiast, finding great release playing games. In recent years her interest expanded beyond the games to the platforms for the games, as she developed growing facility in computer technology. At the time of her death she was working on applying her growing skills in information technology towards future employment.

Patricia was never shy or reticent to express her opinion on a wide range of subjects. She could be quite abrupt, but she was also most approachable, open, and straight forward. Even through the difficult days of her final illness, Patricia maintained a sense of optimism for her recovery.

But as hard as it is to say it, Patricia had great but for the most part unrealized talent. For she had a life-long struggle with alcoholism, and with it, the personal and relational and economic consequences of the disease. She battled other demons as well. It is a terrible tragedy that after years of substance abuse, that just when she was getting and staying sober with more regularity, she fell victim to lung cancer.

It is a sad irony that in the depths of her final illness, Patricia finally secured some release from those life-long demons that plagued her and found some peace at the last. It was as if she finally was able to see what her life and all of life is all about, and through that vision she was able to truly do a self-inventory, and begin to restore long strained and fractured relationships. As she told a friend, "I know that if I did not get this cancer thing in my head, that I would have not found God in me....for my belief."

The source of strength and encouragement for Patricia were her friends in Jaywalkers. For the last five years of her life, this community of fellow alcoholics walked with her and helped her find herself and make that deep spiritual connection in her life too long missing. Although baptized a catholic, Patricia wanted her memorial service here in this church, not because she ever attended worship here on Sunday mornings, but because she found her God in a holy community that meets on Tuesday and Friday nights.

Patricia was predeceased by her mother, Patricia. She is survived by her father Lawrence, her five brothers Joseph, Christopher, Larry, Matt, and Marty; her two sisters Elizabeth and Laura; her children Lauren and Willie and their father William Summers; by 13 nieces and nephews, and by her beloved spiritual brothers and sisters of the Jaywalkers. Having gathered for our mutual support and to hear the comfort of the scriptures, let us worship God:

A specific promise we have in the New Testament is that in Jesus Christ we have a shepherd, a good shepherd, who is prepared to lay down his life for us, his sheep. This is a promise Christ kept. He died that we might live. And in that same passage in John, there is another, lesser known promise: Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me. I lay down my life for my sheep. AND *I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice*".

Now there are several ways to interpret this verse. One way I read this verse is this: NO ONE is excluded from the promises of God. Including those who don't fit the so-called mold, and those who might not even know what to call God, much less when and where to find God. For God has a yearning to bring all of the sheep, all of his children, into the safety of the sheep-fold, the warm embrace of the family of God. God yearns for all of us to live in harmony and community with one another and in communion with him. Because of that yearning, no one who seeks God is ever turned away! And because of that yearning, because of God's promises to us, we can find the vision and strength we need in life, even on a day like this.

Those are the promises of God. Now, what do we do and where do we go from here?

First, I would invite you to pray. Pray for Patricia's family and friends. Pray for yourself. Pray and give thanks God is there, waiting for you. Pray.

Second, let us comfort one another in our loss. Ecclesiastes, in that same chapter when he writes, "there is a time to be born and a time to die", also writes, "There is a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing." Well friends, this is the time for embracing. A time to comfort one another. We cannot remove the loss and grief our friends and family are carrying. But we can share in that burden. We can carry one another. Comfort one another.

And third, I invite you to examine yourself. Not in a sense of judging Patricia or anyone else, but in the sense of taking an inventory of where you are in life and in your spiritual journey. And where you want to be and where you need to be. Take time to take stock.

Friends: we have the confidence to pray, we have the power to extend comfort, and we have courage to look inward, because God offers himself to us and for us. And God assures us, when you walk through those stormy waters, I will be with you. When you hit the bottom in life, I am with you. Even when you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, God will be with you. This is God's promise. This is God's word for you. AMEN.

R. Charles Grant
Pastor
Bon Air Presbyterian Church
Richmond, Virginia
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